

Sponsored by **Frontier**

## Australian system brings UK benefits

**Graham Potter**

 The Grange, Topcliffe,  
North Yorkshire

Yorkshire and Australia have a few things in common. An obvious one is a passion for cricket, and cropping system could soon be another, with Graham Potter taking an Aussie approach on his farm near Thirsk.

Having spent several years on a farm in Western Australia, Graham saw first-hand how soils benefited from precision agronomy, direct drilling and a greater focus on soil health.

"They use variable rates on everything and on the farm I worked at, you really could see the benefits," he says.

Back home on the family farm, he explains that the combine needed replacing and they recognised that the way they farmed the land needed to change, as soil health was suffering.

"So I thought, what's stopping us doing the same on a smaller scale in Yorkshire?"

He started four years ago by investing in GPS technology to enable variable applications of N, P, K and seed, replaced the combine, tractor and bought a new Claydon direct drill.

RTK guidance then enabled Graham to adopt controlled traffic farming, creating permanent tramlines for tractors, sprayers and the combine to travel on to minimise compaction.

This extra accuracy with RTK guidance also allows crops to be established with the Claydon in 30cm rows, with subsequent crops shifted 15cm.

"Seed is, therefore, drilled into the clean row middle, avoiding the problem of stubble interfering with the drill," he says.

To help spread the capital cost, Graham has branched into contract harvesting on two neighbouring farms, as well as offering consultancy on precision farming, GateKeeper and the John Deere Green Star Systems.

Graham estimates the machinery investment will pay for itself by next summer through a com-



Graham Potter is using RTK guidance to adopt a controlled traffic farming system with permanent tramlines.

bination of lower costs and higher crop yields.

Moving to a min-till system has cut fuel use and labour requirements, with Graham comfortably managing the workload alone, with help from a seasonal worker during harvest.

Crop yields have started to rise, which he believes is due to the improved soil fertility resulting from precision application of fertiliser.

"Wheat averaged 10-10.2t/ha and last year we were up to 11t/ha. I believe we will eventually reach 12-12.5t/ha. There is more we can achieve," he says.

The improved soil fertility is also being seen in his soil maps. "We are starting to see fields even up for P indices with fewer colours on the map."

Soil health is another of Graham's passions, with his focus on getting organic matter back into his soils. But he is doing it the hard way – without the use of manure or slurry, instead relying on a combination of chopping straw and cover cropping.

"Because of the weed seed risk, I have a policy of not using manures brought in from other farms." His concerns over heavy metal loading also rules out the

use of sewage sludge.

This approach is understandable given that his farm has no resistant blackgrass problem and he wants it to stay that way.

Cover crops consist of vetches, phacelia and forage rye and are environment focus area (EFA) compliant. His rotation is first wheat, second wheat and then a cover crop prior to fodder beet on lighter land and spring barley on heavier land.

Other technology includes kit

### THE JUDGES LIKED

- \* Early adopter of new technology
- \* Very knowledgeable about precision farming
- \* Remote control of grain dryer with a unique app

### FARM FACTS

- \* 195ha family-owned business
- \* Cropping winter wheat, oilseed rape, fodder beet and cover crops
- \* Staff comprise Graham and a seasonal worker
- \* Soils are a wide range, from clay to blowing sand

imported from Australia to enable variable-rate spraying with his Bateman sprayer and next year he hopes to vary growth regulator applications on oilseed rape, according to green area index.

However, one unique gadget he developed with a friend is an app that enables him to control his grain dryer while sat in the combine cab.

"I can see exactly what is happening with the handling equipment and the dryer, and make adjustments as necessary."

Half of his grain and rapeseed is sold into a pool and the rest on the open market, using Gleadall, Frontier, Openfield and Nideria. Graham looks to add value where possible.

"We have a feed mill just up the road and I get a £5/t bonus by delivering feed wheat." This season, the improved soil fertility has seen a return of milling wheat to the rotation.

Looking to the future, this corner of Yorkshire is set to see a growing Aussie influence.

Graham has big ambitions to grow his consultancy and eventually take on more land, farming it using his proven system from Australia.